

JOINT EVENT

High-level Meeting on Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies:

Risk Communication as part of a Whole of Society approach

6-7 NOV 2024, SINGAPORE

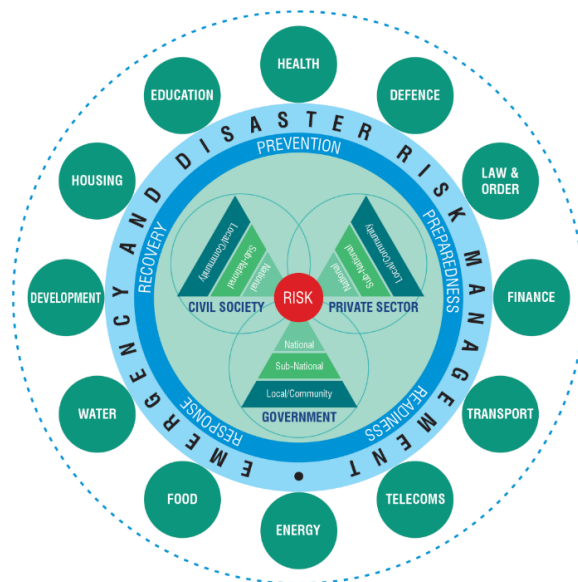


SCOPE & PURPOSE

Risk Communication and a Whole of Society (WoS) approach

Risk Communication played an essential role connecting the science and communities in the latest Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) caused by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This pandemic taught us how the quality of information the population receives greatly influences behaviour. Governments tried to make the best possible decisions based on the science available and other related factors in an attempt to save lives, yet communicating such decisions was not an easy task – especially when the boundaries of responsibilities among the stakeholders involved, including, politicians, scientists, and spokespersons, was vague in the changing pandemic situation. In such circumstances, who explains what and the level of details presented are often undefined. Strengthening a cross-sectoral collaboration, in other words, implementing a Whole of Society (WoS) approach, has become a key to overcoming those difficulties.

Figure 1. Whole-of-society action for health emergency and disaster risk management



<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339421>

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “The whole-of-society approach acknowledges and promotes the full and effective contributions of all relevant stakeholders to the risk management of emergencies. Such stakeholders include individuals, families and communities, governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and industry, faith groups, civil society, the media, academia, research bodies and voluntary associations. The whole-of-society approach also



recognizes the need to support the strengthening of coordination among these stakeholders, to improve the effectiveness of these efforts and to address the critical interdependencies across sectors at all levels¹. From the COVID-19 pandemic experience, it became evident that decisions had to be taken even in times of high uncertainty while new evidence was evolving, which presented significant challenges for communication. Meanwhile, an Infodemic² could also cause confusion, feeding to risk-taking behaviours that harm health while making communication more complex. Complexity was also brought on by new technologies and platforms that provided a range of communication methods; such can be seen in social media and other social networking services. A wide variety of population groups had different concerns and priorities. In those conditions, engaging and/or collaborating with all sectors of society is essential in implementing effective Risk Communication, and therefore, Risk Communication should be an integrated part of WoS approach.

In 2024, ASEF Public Health Network (ASEF PHN) and the Asia Centre for Health Security (ACHS) will jointly organise a High-level Meeting on Risk Communication for Public Health Emergencies (PHEs): Risk Communication as part of WoS approach. Participants will reflect on how Risk Communication was positioned in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will discuss how to embed it better within Pandemic Preparedness and Response (PPR) in the future.

OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the High-level Meeting is to strengthen countries' capacity to support Risk Communication for PHEs. It provides a platform for bi-regional exchange on the best practices and lessons identified concerning Risk Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, especially in relation to WoS approach.

Specific objectives of the meeting are:

- To address the challenges on the boundary of communication, such as the role of politicians; communicators; and scientists
- To discuss ways to promote positive behaviour change through Risk Communication linked with WoS approach
- To facilitate networking among the Risk Communication implementers across Asia and Europe; and
- To determine the areas of international/inter-sectoral collaboration to improve Risk Communication for the future PHEs

Target Audience

The High-level Meeting will aim to include the following audiences: i) Government officials in charge of health emergencies and emergency risk communication; ii) Government officials from sectors other than health that are involved in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and iii) representatives from civil society, including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), International Organisations (IOs), academia as well as the private sector. More specifically, the meeting would aim to reach out to:

- Senior-level officials, advisors and/or other decision-makers from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Health or equivalent
- Spokespersons/senior-level media personnel from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Health or equivalent
- Senior-level officials, advisors and/or other decision-makers from ASEM Partners' Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Tourism and other related Ministries
- Representatives of NGOs, IOs, academics and companies whose work is related to Risk Communication and the COVID-19 pandemic

¹ [Everyone's business: whole-of-society action to manage health risks and reduce socio-economic impacts of emergencies and disasters: operational guidance](#)

² [Infodemic \(who.int\)](#)



EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The High-level Meeting will foster the exchange of good practices and lessons identified during the COVID-19 pandemic in establishing and improving Risk Communication processes in Asia and Europe. The outcome of the meeting will be summarised as a short report containing the key recommendations.

ABOUT THE JOINT HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

This event is via invitation only – Participants are required to register prior to the meeting, regardless of the mode of participation.

ORGANIZERS



Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Website: <http://www.ASEF.org>

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), founded in 1997, is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation representing the [53 Asia-Europe Meeting \(ASEM\) Partners](#): 30 European and 21 Asian countries, plus the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. Following the 6th ASEM Summit (ASEM6; 2006; Helsinki, Finland) where the leaders expressed their determination to combat avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic, the “ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza”, financially supported by the Government of Japan, was launched at the 9th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (ASEM FMM9; 2009; Hanoi, Viet Nam). Since then, the two components of the Initiative, ASEM stockpile of anti-viral drugs and personal protective equipment, as well as ASEF Public Health Network (ASEF PHN) have contributed to strengthening ASEM Partners’ capacity for managing Public Health Emergencies (PHEs).

ASEF PHN’s scope is not limited to pandemic influenza – it expands to Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs) as well as Pandemic Preparedness and Response (PPR). ASEF PHN has been working on Risk Communication for PHEs – Prior to the pandemic, ASEF PHN implemented a series of High-level Meetings focusing on [Risk Communication & Leadership \(2017\)](#), [How Can We Include Migrants & Ethnic Minorities \(2018\)](#), and [Risk Communication Beyond the Country Borders \(2019\)](#) for effective Risk Communication during PHEs. In 2020, ASEF PHN conducted a research project “[Monitoring and Evaluation for evidence-based Risk Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)”. During the pandemic, virtual conferences were implemented focusing on “[Risk Communication during high uncertainty](#)”, “[Combating infodemic & effective use of social media](#)” & “[Increasing vaccine confidence](#)” sharing good practices and lessons learnt across Asia and Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the hybrid meeting “[the Role of Risk Communication in Pandemics](#)” in 2022.



Saw Swee Hock
School of Public Health

Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, the National University of Singapore (NUS)

Building upon decades of experience in research, training and practice in epidemiology and public health since 1948, the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, under the National University of Singapore, was established in October 2011 as Singapore's national school of public health. The School is also a member of the National University Health System (NUHS).

The School aims to continually foster healthier communities in Singapore and the region, and impact public health programmes and policies through its robust educational programmes and translational cross-disciplinary research work on cohort studies and life course epidemiology, infectious disease research, health technology assessments, health promotion, workplace safety and health, health systems evaluation and health services research. An interdisciplinary approach, augmented by rigorous training, applicable research and regional partnerships, places the School at the forefront of public health knowledge discovery and practice in Asia.

The School actively collaborates with many partners including the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Karolinska Institute, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and University of Michigan School of Public Health. Its flagship programme, the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree, attracts students from a wide range of disciplines from within Singapore and throughout the region.

For more information, visit sph.nus.edu.sg



Asia Centre for Health Security (ACHS)

The Asia Centre for Health Security (ACHS) is a new academic think tank working towards forestalling and alleviating the impact of biological threats of the future, through collaborative research and capacity development in systems evaluation and strengthening in Asia.

Based at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore (NUS), the centre operates in close partnership with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University.

The centre is funded through philanthropic contributions from individuals and organisations.

For more information, visit asia-chs.org



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